

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
TO SECSTATE PRIORITY 5399
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

UNCLAS JOHANNESBURG 2199

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EGEN, EIND, ELAB, SF

SUBJECT: WELKOM EARTHQUAKE, DECEMBER 8 - INITIAL DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

1. SUMMARY. WELKOM IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE DIGS OUT OF THE RUBBLE AFTER BEING HIT BY AN EARTHQUAKE OF 4.8 ON THE RICHTER SCALE OF 10. MIRACULOUSLY, LOSS HAS BEEN SMALL - ONE BLACK MINEWORKER WAS KILLED BY A ROCKFALL UNDERGROUND AS THE RESULT OF THE QUAKE - AND REPORTED INJURIES WERE SLIGHT IN A TOTAL OF SOME 10,000 MEN UNDERGROUND. DAMAGE IS STILL BEING ASSESSED BUT WILL RUN INTO MILLIONS OF DOLLARS. ESSENTIAL SERVICES, TELEPHONE, RAILROADS, WATER, SEWAGE AND ELECTRICITY LINES ARE MOSTLY BACK IN ORDER. GENERAL BUSINESS ACTIVITY IS QUICKLY BACK TO NEAR NORMAL IN THIS CITY OF 145,000 THOUSAND WHICH IS NOW THE LARGEST CITY IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE. END SUMMARY.

2. ANGLO AMERICAN CORPORATIONS (AAC) PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER, REPORTS THAT ONE (1) BLACK MINEWORKER, CHILMANE SELOMO, OF LESOTHO, HAD BEEN KILLED BY A ROCKFALL UNDERGROUND (AT THE FIRM'S WELKOM GOLD MINE) AS THE RESULT OF THE QUAKE. TWO MINEWORKERS RECEIVED SUPERFICIAL INJURIES AT ANGLO'S NEARBY PRESIDENT BRAND MINE, AND THREE OTHERS WERE TRAPPED IN AN UNDERGROUND WORKING AREA AT THE SAME MINE FOR A SHORT PERIOD. THERE WERE NO OTHER REPORTED INJURIES IN A TOTAL ROSTER OF SOME 10,000 MEN UNDERGROUND AT THE TIME

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(AT ANGLO AMERICANS WELKOM, WESTERN HOLDINGS, PRESIDENT

STEYN, PRESIDENT BRAND AND FREE STATE GEDULD MINES). UNCONFIRMED REPORTS OF GOLD MINES IN THE WELKOM AREA ADMINISTERED BY OTHER GROUPS (LORAIN, FREDDIES, ST. HELENA, FREE STATE SAAIPLAAS, HARMONY, VIRGINIA ORANGE FREE STATE AND MERRIESPRUIT) ARE EQUALLY FAVORABLE.

3. AAC RECEIVED UPDATED REPORTS EARLY DECEMBER 9 ON CONDITIONS AT EACH OF THE COMPANY'S WELKOM AREA MINES AND HAD BEEN ASSURED THAT PRELIMINARY STUDIES INDICATED UNDERGROUND DAMAGE TO HAVE BEEN NEGLIGIBLE. SURFACE FACILITIES- PLANTS, OFFICES AND WORKERS LIVING QUARTERS - APPEARED TO HAVE SUSTAINED ONLY MINOR STRUCTURAL DAMAGES.

4. WHILE ALL OF ANGLO AMERICAN'S WELKOM AREA MINES WERE EVACUATED IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE 10:38 AM QUAKE, AND FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE DAY, ALL MINES REPORTEDLY WENT BACK TO NORMAL OPERATING PROGRAMS THE FOLLOWING DAY (DECEMBER 9). FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS ACCURATELY TO ASSESS POST-QUAKE CONDITIONS UNDERGROUND AND ON THE SURFACE ARE CONTINUING UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF SAG'S INSPECTOR OF MINES AND COMPANY HEALTH AND SAFETY TEAMS. WHEN QUESTIONED AS TO THE APPARENT CAUSE OF THE EARTHQUAKE, THE AAC SPOKESMAN SAID IT SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN THE DIRECT RESULT OF FAULT ACTION IN THE IMMEDIATE AREA, AND NOT REPEAT NOT, THAT OF A MINING RELATED FORMATION DIP-SLIP, SUBSIDENCE OR ROCK BURST.

5. BARCLAYS AND STANDARD, THE NUMBER ONE AND NUMBER TWO BANKS IN THE COUNTRY WITH NATION WIDE BRANCH BANKING HAVE PROVIDED SUMMARIES FROM THEIR ON SITE MANAGERS, OF DEVELOPMENTS LARGELY SUBSTANTIATING THE REPORTS FROM THE MINES AND AS REPORTED IN THE PRESS. ALTHOUGH THERE IS VIRTUALLY NOT AN UNBROKEN WINDOW IN THE CITY WHOSE MAIN STREET APPARENTLY FALLS RIGHT ALONG THE FAULT LINE, THERE HAS BEEN NO PANIC, NO LOOTING AND NO EXTENSIVE FIRE DAMAGE.

6. THE NEARBY BLACK TOWNSHIP OF THABONG WITH A POPULATION OF SOME 36,000 IS REPORTED TO HAVE SUSTAINED LITTLE DAMAGE AND NO LOSS OF LIFE; HOSTELS SEEM TO HAVE SUSTAINED MOST UNCLASSIFIED

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DAMAGE. SERVICES THERE ARE ALSO REPORTED TO BE NORMAL WITH REGULAR TRANSPORTATION INTO WELKOM NEARLY ON NORMAL SCHEDULES.

7. THERE WILL BE A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF WHITE HOMELESS IN THE CITY OF WELKOM AS A RESULT OF THE COLLAPSE OF SEVERAL MULTI-STORY APARTMENT HOUSES. HOWEVER, REPORTS ARE THAT THE SAG'S CIVIL DEFENCE SERVICES HAVE RESPONDED

ADMIRABLY AND PROMPTLY WITH EMERGENCY HOUSING AND
ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND FOOD. HOSPITALS AND NURSING HOMES
HAVE BEEN HARD HIT AND THERE ARE CONTINUING EVACUATIONS OF
UNSAFE BUILDINGS AS INSPECTIONS CARRY ON.

8. INITIAL ASSESSMENTS FROM THE BANKS ARE SKETCH BUT
INSURANCE CLAIMS WILL BE HIGH (IN EXCESS OF \$10 MILLION
FOR PROPERTY ALONE) EVEN THOUGH, ACCORDING TO THE BANKS,
80 PERCENT OF THE APARTMENT TENANTS WERE UNINSURED.

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